

CORNELL UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

ENGLISH COLLECTION



**THE GIFT OF
JAMES MORGAN HART
PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH**

THE BEWCASTLE CROSS

BY

ALBERT S. COOK

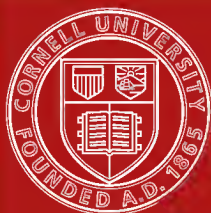
PROFESSOR OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN YALE UNIVERSITY

Read before the Modern Language Association
of America, at Cornell University, Dec. 29, 1909



PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR
NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

1913
E.V.



Cornell University
Library

The original of this book is in
the Cornell University Library.

There are no known copyright restrictions in
the United States on the use of the text.

<http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924031440112>

PREFACE

My first publication dealing with the date of either of the two famous runic crosses in England appeared in 1890 (*Academy* 37. 153-4). In this I came to the conclusion that the language of the poetic fragments on the Ruthwell Cross must be as late as the 10th century, and very likely subsequent to 950. In 1901 I resumed and extended my investigation of 1890, and came to the same general result as then (*Pub. Mod. Lang. Assoc. of America* 17. 375-390).

Not until 1909 had I seen either cross, but in August of that year I visited both Ruthwell and Bewcastle (Ruthwell, Aug. 25 and 27; Bewcastle, Aug. 26). I then attacked the problem of the Bewcastle Cross for the first time, and on December 29 of that year read the following paper before the Modern Language Association of America. If any one will take the trouble to compare this sketch with my monograph, 'The Date of the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses' (*Trans. Conn. Acad. of Arts and Sciences* 17 (1912). 213-361), he will see that the general conclusions as to date do not differ widely in the two papers, though of course the treatment is much fuller in the later one, and new evidence is introduced. It may be worth noting that it was not until 1910 that I became acquainted with the views of either Enlart or Rivoira; my first knowledge of the latter's work came to me in a communication from England, dated Sept. 15, 1910.

YALE UNIVERSITY, April 18, 1913.

THE BEWCASTLE CROSS

On account of the limitations of time, I shall attempt to present no more than the briefest outline of my subject.

I suppose it is generally known that the accepted date for the erection of the Bewcastle Cross, far up toward the Scottish border in Cumberland, is 670, the first year of King Ecgfrith, and that the Ruthwell Cross, about 25 miles away, near the Solway Firth, and on practically the same parallel of latitude, is contemporaneous with it.

In 1901 I attempted to show before this body that the Ruthwell Cross is to be assigned to a date at least as late as the 10th century. To-day I wish to present, with the utmost brevity, the considerations which lead me to assign the Bewcastle Cross to a still later date, perhaps the first quarter of the 12th century. These heads of discourse I hold myself ready to amplify and defend when my paper comes to be published.

Both the Ruthwell and the Bewcastle Cross are adorned with sculptured figures and scenes from the Bible, and the Ruthwell Cross, besides, with one from the life of two saints. Both have vines, in which sit birds and animals, pecking at the fruit. In addition to this, the Bewcastle Cross has panels of interlaced or knot work, a sundial, a panel of chequer-work, and a group consisting of a man, a hawk, and, apparently, a perch for the hawk.

The Ruthwell Cross has an extract from *The Dream of the Rood* in runes, while the Bewcastle Cross has a runic inscription of nine lines, partly undecipherable, and a few shorter lines of runes, mostly undecipherable, consisting in part, at least, of proper names. Of these, one is especially important for our purpose, the name Jesus Christ, spelled *Gessus Kristtus*.

All authorities agree that the crosses are virtually contemporaneous. I intend to deal chiefly with the Bewcastle Cross, but shall refer to the Ruthwell Cross when necessary.

All modern interpretations, so far as they refer the Bewcastle Cross to the 7th century, go back to Maughan's readings in 1857. Maughan was for some years rector of Bewcastle church, which, with the rectory and one or two other houses, situated in a hilly, moorland, desolate region, constitute the hamlet of Bewcastle. A Roman road, called the Maiden Way, can still be traced southward to the Roman Wall, eight or ten miles distant; and the remains of the ruined mediæval castle, made of stones from the Roman station within whose precincts the church is situated, still tower conspicuously near. Maughan was an amateur antiquary, like Haigh, his most formidable rival. In 1854 Maughan could make but little of the runes, and what he did read was inconsistent with his readings between that date and 1857. Haigh's readings were radically different from both. Maughan's readings and renderings were followed by George Stephens, in his *Old-Northern Runic Monuments*, by Henry Sweet, by Bishop Browne, and by Professor Collingwood—these being the chief Englishmen who have written on the subject.

A critical study of both crosses was published by Viotor in 1895, with the result that he leaves very

little of the readings proposed by Maughan for the Bewcastle Cross.

In one place on the southern side of the cross Maughan reads *Ecgfriþu*. Here Vietor finds nothing but a few faint, undecipherable traces; below, Maughan reads *fruman gear*, interpreting it as 'in the first year.' Assuming that *Ecgfriþu* is the genitive, he thus gets 'in the first year of Ecgfrith,' etc., and so secures a date for the Cross. Haigh disagrees with him totally about these readings, and Vietor finds nothing that can be read. All the assumptions as to date, then, which rest upon a blind following of Maughan, are untrustworthy. Some of his readings seem to be correct, or nearly so, but those on which he chiefly depended for dating the cross are non-existent or illegible.

So much, very cursorily, for destructive criticism of Maughan's view. I now propose to touch upon a series of points of a more constructive character.

1. The compound word *sigbekn*, 'victory-sign,' seems to be legible in the long inscription. This, referring to the cross, and traceable ultimately to Constantine's *In hoc signo vinces*, is found four times in the Old English *Elene*, and may here be allusive to that poem. If so, the date of the cross can hardly be in the 7th century.

2. On both the Bewcastle and the Ruthwell Cross, John the Baptist carries an aureoled lamb, the *Agnus Dei*. Didron, in his *Christian Iconography*, knows of no example of this earlier than one of the 13th century, in the cathedral of Rheims. We should not expect to find it, then, in the 7th century.

3. If the man, the hawk, and the perch for the hawk, indicate that the sport of falconry was practised in England before this date, we may draw an infer-

ence from the fact that falconry, according to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, was introduced into England about 860.

4. There is deep cutting, if not undercutting, on both crosses, though perhaps more noticeable on the Ruthwell. Parker says this requires the use of the chisel, and that such deep cutting is found on no building of ascertained date before 1120.

5. There is a panel of chequers on the Bewcastle Cross. Now chequers are an acknowledged feature of Norman work. Hence, inferentially, the Bewcastle Cross should fall within the Norman period.

6. The words *Gessus Kristtus* on the Bewcastle Cross have a parallel in *Gesus Krist (Krt)* on two censers found in Denmark, both of which are assigned by Professor Wimmer to the last quarter of the 13th century. The use of *G* for *J* is, he says, sufficiently common at that period.

7. All writers agree that the sundial belongs to the original sculpture. There are other sundials in England which are approximately referred to 943, 1065, 1096, 11th century, 12th century, 13th century, and 1400. There are several in Cumberland and Westmorland that Professor Collingwood assigns to the 12th century and Norman churches, that which most resembles the Bewcastle dial being the latest of all these.

8. Two words in the long inscription which are as plain as any are *æft Alcfriþu*, meaning 'in memory of Alcfriþu.' *Æft*, a variant of *æfter*, is nowhere found in Old English in this sense except here and on a few other memorial stones, but, with its variants, it is very common in Scandinavian inscriptions, and occurs several times in runic inscriptions of the Isle of Man belonging to the years 1050—1100, as well as a very few times on stones of the Northern and

Western Isles, where the Norsemen had settled. It is fair to presume, then, that it had reached Cumberland from the Isle of Man, not earlier than 1050, and probably later.

9. If *Alcfripu* is the correct reading, this may be a feminine, and parallel to the *Fripu* on one of the runic crosses in the Isle of Man.

10. These two high crosses of Great Britain must at least, from a comparison of their structure and ornament, be as late as the high crosses of Ireland, some of which can be dated by the names of historical persons which they contain. The earliest of these dates from 904, and the latest from 1161. The Crucifixion is common on the Irish crosses, and is found on the Ruthwell Cross.

11. The vine-scrolls of both our crosses are noticeable. They are not found in the Lindisfarne Gospels, 698–721, but something like them, or at least scrolls of foliage, occur in the Book of Kells, which competent authorities now incline to place at the beginning of the 10th century; and they are also found on the Irish high crosses, which, as we have seen, can in no case be dated earlier than 904. Moreover, when such vines have, like these, birds and beasts intermingled, Sophus Müller, the chief authority on the subject of zoömorphie decoration in the Germanic countries, thinks they can not be earlier than the year 1000.

There are other considerations into which I will not enter here, but none that would contradict, or much modify, what has here been adduced.

By none of the tests do we reach a date much, if any, earlier than 900, and by some affinities the cross might belong to the 13th century. I am at present inclined to refer it to the first quarter of the 12th century, for the following reasons :

1. The crosses contain features of Celtic, Scandinavian, Old English, and Norman provenience. They can hardly antedate the Norman Conquest, then, since the early Norman part of Westminster Abbey, the first piece of Norman work in England, was finished in 1066.

2. The first strong and enlightened government that this part of Great Britain had experienced since the Romans left the country was at the hands of David I, who ruled Cumbria as prince or earl, with practically royal authority, from 1107 to 1124, and ruled Scotland admirably for 29 years more. David was educated and capable, founded Glasgow cathedral and several monasteries, was anxious to Christianize this region more perfectly, and used every endeavor to that end. His wife was a Saxon, and his friends Normans. He could command the best skill, since, like several of his royal relatives, he welcomed strangers of ability, and Normans and Saxons flocked to his court. His mother, Queen Margaret, one of the most perfect characters of history, was noted for her love of the arts—of beautiful books, gold and silver vessels, and embroidery. She founded the abbey of Dunfermline, and restored Iona. Moreover, she was devoted to the idea of the cross, every day recited the matins of the Holy Cross, erected beautiful crucifixes in the churches of St. Andrews and Dunfermline, before the latter of which she was buried, and cherished with the most passionate devotion on her deathbed a cross of gold set with large diamonds, enclosing an image of Christ sculptured in ivory, and adorned with gold, together with a fragment of the True Cross—the whole enclosed in a black case, whence the cross was familiarly known as the Black Cross. This she had brought with her—perhaps originally from the Continent—when she

came to Scotland, this she bequeathed as an heirloom to her sons, and for this David built the church of Holyrood. The place where her husband fell in battle was marked by a commemorative cross, whence the place is still called Malcolm's Cross. The chapel of St. Margaret, on Castle Hill, the oldest building in Edinburgh, was probably erected by one of her sons to her memory. As for the so-called Black Cross, described above, it was carried off to England by Edward I, but regained by Robert Bruce.

David I, then, had the power in the district where the two crosses are found. He was devoted to his mother's memory, as his foundation of Holyrood shows, no less than she had been devoted to the idea of the cross; he had the requisite education and taste; in his lineage and in his person were represented all the races whose influence can be traced in the two crosses; he had the zeal for religious foundations, for building, for administration; he could command the skill; and he had a sufficient motive, were others lacking, in his desire to exalt Christianity within his province, and especially to mark its southern border, where it faced the English, by monuments which his people could admire and cherish, which proclaimed his faith and his filial piety, and which embodied and concentrated in themselves features from every branch of sculptural art which had flourished in the British Isles.

The time suggested agrees with the various indications furnished by the work. Since there was no powerful prelate or rich monastery in the vicinity of the crosses, the task was one for royal munificence and resources; and the character and ambitions, nay, the love and loyalty of the prince, provided sufficient motives for the undertaking. The attribution to this

author does not admit of the strictest proof, but is perhaps as plausible as any hypothesis on the subject is likely to be. I can think of only one serious objection, and that is that certain of the runic words decipherable may seem of too great antiquity; but we must remember, as Wimmer, the greatest living runologist, has told us, that older forms are not infrequently found upon stones of the latest period.

Cornell University Library

arW9373

The Bewcastle cross /



3 1924 031 440 112

oIn,anx

